

Kenny Talks Purdue Transfers And Coaches



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Columnist

Purdue Players Transfer To Different Schools, Hoping For Greener Pastures

When college football's version of musical chairs, the transfer portal, closed on April 30 there were 2,640 athletes looking for new homes according to On3.com.

That number would fill the 85-man scholarship limit for 31 of the 69 Power 5 conference schools. Take away Deion Sanders and his massive cuts (56 players) at Colorado, and most schools have between 10 to 20 athletes looking for a new home.

Now add in the high school recruiting classes and some junior college transfers. The math says hundreds of these homeless players won't be playing major college football in the fall.

Purdue saw 22 players depart for what they hope are greener pastures. The biggest losses were starting guard Spencer Holstege (UCLA), starting tackle Eric Miller (Louisville) and three graduate transfers: defensive tackles Branson Deen (Miami, Fla.) and Lawrence Johnson (Auburn), and defensive end Jack Sullivan (USC). Former starting wide receiver Milton Wright, who was academically ineligible for the 2021 Music City Bowl and the 2022 season, entered the transfer portal on the final day.

Presumed starting quarterback Hudson Card (Texas), former Auburn four-star defensive lineman Jeffrey M'ba and former Mississippi four-star cornerback Braxton Myers lead the 16-man (so far) Boilermaker transfer class.

Linebacker Dasan McCullough and his brother, safety Deland McCullough, are among the most notable of the 20 former Indiana players in the portal. Former Tennessee quarterback Tayven Jackson heads the 18 players coming to Bloomington from other schools.

For a new coach like Purdue's Ryan Walters, the transfer portal is a necessary evil to fill perceived needs that Jeff Brohm's 2020-22 recruiting classes failed to address. It remains to be seen whether Walters has improved the secondary and offensive line, arguably the Boilermakers' weakest units.

Let's take a look at those three Brohm recruiting classes.

The 2020 group was ranked 32nd by 247Sports, topped by five four-star recruits. Unfortunately, only Zionsville graduate Gus Hartwig has lived up to that billing.

Hartwig has been that rare species in college football, an offensive lineman who played (and started) as a true freshman.

Four-star receiver Maliq Carr was lured away by Michigan State after making one catch for 15 yards during the COVID-abreviated 2020 season. In two seasons with the Spartans, Carr has 24 receptions for 344 yards and two touchdowns.

Four-star quarterback Michael Alaimo threw for 74 yards and a touchdown last season. He is among the 22 Boilermakers in the transfer portal.

Four-star running back Tirek Murphy never played a down before transferring to Rhode Island. Four-star wide receiver Abdur-Rahmaan Yaseen has battled injuries for three seasons.

The good news? The class had two future NFL players: junior college defensive end DaMarcus Mitchell (New England) and safety Tyler Coyle (Dallas), who transferred from Connecticut. Another transfer, Greg Long, was a two-year starter at offensive tackle after transferring from UTEP.

The bad news? Only 11 of the 27 recruits remain on Purdue's roster. Hartwig, safety Sanoussi Kane and linebacker Kydran Jenkins are starters. Josh Kaltenberger took over at center last season when Hartwig was lost to a knee injury. Yaseen caught four passes in eight games last season.

Reserve linebacker Clyde Washington has played in 24 games. Safety Antonio Stevens suffered a devastating knee injury as a freshman but appeared in 13 games in 2022. Linebackers Ben Kreul and Ryan Brandt have been on special teams. Offensive linemen Jared Bycznski and Nalin Fox haven't been major contributors.

Linebacker Yanni Karlaftis was the only 4-star recruit among the 26-man class. Injuries and position switches have hampered his progress but he has three years of eligibility remaining. Walters' defensive scheme might finally take advantage of Karlaftis' skills.

Three of the high school recruits have become starters: offensive linemen Mahamane Moussa and Marcus Mbow, along with punter Jack Ansell. Outside linebacker Khor-dae Sydnor has been a major contributor, as has junior college defensive tackle Prince James Boyd Jr. The jury remains out on wide receivers Deion Burks and Preston Terrell, and tight end Drew Biber.

Three members of the class are in the transfer portal and a fourth, running back Ja'Quez Cross didn't finish his freshman season and transferred to Arkansas State.

The saving grace of the 2021 class were the transfers, most notably Music City Bowl standouts Broc Thompson and safety Chris Jefferson. Guard Tyler Witt and linebacker

O.C. Brothers became starters. Indiana transfer Damarjhe Lewis was a major contributor at defensive tackle before missing the 2022 season with a broken ankle. Former Carmel standout Dylan Downing has been part of the running back rotation.

On paper, the 2022 Purdue recruiting class improved significantly, moving up to 38th in the 247 Sports composite rankings. There is promise that still could be fulfilled, although one of the four, four-star recruits has entered the transfer portal (Indiana Mr. Football Brady Allen).

Outside linebacker Nic Caraway played every game as a true freshman, recording two sacks among his 22 tackles. The other four-star recruits, defensive end Joe Strickland and wide receiver Curtis Deville, redshirted.

Defensive tackle Mo Omonode of West Lafayette recorded seven tackles in 11 games while filling the void left by Lewis' injury.

The star of the class, however, was Iowa transfer wide receiver Charlie Jones. A fourth-round draft pick of the Cincinnati Bengals, Jones became an All-American in his lone season at Purdue.

Three other key transfers were former Carmel standout Cole Brevard, 2017 Indiana Mr. Football Reese Taylor and wide receiver/running back Tyrone Tracy.

Of the 26-member class, seven went into the transfer portal: Allen, running backs Kentrell Marks and Kobe Lewis (Florida Atlantic), guard Sione Finau (Arizona State), tight end Charlie Kenrich, safety Jordan Buchanan and cornerback Tee Denson.

Flanagan, A Profile And The Next Big Ten Coach

It was never fun for opposing centers to see Chicago Bears legend Dick Butkus lined up across the line of scrimmage.

For Detroit Lions center Ed Flanagan, it was a rivalry that was played out twice a year from 1965 to 1973.

Flanagan, who starred at Purdue before launching a 12-year NFL career, once described Butkus as "a wild man on defense, one of the most foul-mouthed guys in the league. He insults you, your mother, and the team."

Butkus was not above spitting down the back of Flanagan's neck, either.

Flanagan died May 10 in his hometown of Altoona, Pa., at the age of 79 of heart failure, the Altoona Mirror reported. His family announced that Flanagan's brain was donated to the center for the study of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) at Boston University.

Flanagan earned second-team All-Big Ten honors as a senior in 1964, snapping the ball to future College and Pro Football Hall of

Fame quarterback Bob Griese. Flanagan only started one season in high school and one season at Purdue.

"I was never a star," Flanagan told Jim Lane of the Altoona Mirror upon his induction into the inaugural class of the Blair County (Pa.) Sports Hall of Fame in 1987.

"I guess it shows it's never too late."

His coach at Purdue, Jack Mollenkopf, was known for developing linemen and Flanagan was one of his best.

"You name what you want done and Ed can do it," Mollenkopf said. "He's a steady player and a darned good one."

That lack of starting experience didn't stop the Lions from selecting Flanagan in the fifth round of the 1965 NFL Draft. It proved to be a steal. Flanagan was selected to the NFL all-rookie team and was a four-time Pro Bowl selection while starting every game for the next nine seasons, a span of 129 games.

Flanagan was chosen to the Lions' all-time team in 2019.

"He was an outstanding center," his former position coach and later NFL head coach Chuck Knox told The Detroit News in 2014. "He had been a wrestler in high school and college and had good balance. Plus, he was tough and smart."

Flanagan signed with the San Diego Chargers in 1975 and started for two seasons before retiring.

The next great Big Ten coach?

Like the NFL, there's no offseason these days for college football and the media that cover the sport.

Normally, an online story in May making "bold predictions" about Big Ten Conference football in 2023 is worth the paper it's written on.

But this Fansided column by John Buhler lived up to its bold billing.

Matt Rhule guiding Nebraska to a bowl game in his first season qualifies. The Cornhuskers haven't been in the postseason since losing 38-24 to Tennessee in the 2016 Music City Bowl.

Slightly less bold is Buhler's prediction that the Ferentz era ends at Iowa when head coach Kirk's son, Brian, is fired as offensive coordinator by athletic director Gary Barta. The younger Ferentz will only keep his job if the Hawkeyes average 25 points a game this season.

Iowa ranked 12th in the Big Ten a year ago with its 17.7 scoring average. Buhler predicts the Hawkeyes will fall short, leading to Kirk Ferentz's resignation when his son is fired. Buhler's prediction for the new Iowa head coach? Former Hawkeye and current Kentucky head coach Mark Stoops.

KENNY From Page 2

The No. 1 bold prediction? “Ryan Walters emerges as the Big Ten’s new coaching rock star at Purdue.”

“Walters picked a fantastic spot to be a first-time head coach,” Buhler wrote, probably the first time fantastic and Purdue football have been in the same sentence in decades.

“Purdue isn’t going 10-2, but Walters could go 8-4 in his first season at the helm.

“Even if Walters does not achieve what (Jeff) Brohm did in West Lafayette, he will be a strong college football head coach we will talk about for well over a decade.

“There is a chance the Walters hire could be as good as Sonny Dykes at TCU or Brian Kelly at LSU.”

Dykes led TCU to a 13-2 record and a berth in the College Football Playoff during his first season. Kelly went 10-4 in his first season at LSU after his shocking departure from Notre Dame.

Unmentioned by Buhler is another reason why Walters could make his bold prediction come true: the transfer portal.

It is possible that many of the seven new starters on defense will come from the portal. Incoming cornerbacks Braxton Myers (Mississippi), Salim Turner-Muhammad (Stanford) and Marquis Wilson (Penn State) could be paired with, or challenge, veteran Jamari Brown.

Jeffrey M’Bba (Auburn), Malik Langham (Vanderbilt) and Isaiah Nichols (Arkansas) will compete to replace Branson Deen (Miami, Fla.), Lawrence Johnson (Auburn) and Jack Sullivan (USC).

Transfers also are likely to fill the holes left on the offensive line by the departures of Spencer Holstege to UCLA and Eric Miller to Louisville. Ben Farrell (Indiana Wesleyan), Jalen Grant (Bowling Green), Luke Griffin (Missouri) and Preston Nichols (UNLV) are among the candidates.

The portal also restocked the quarterback room with Hudson Card (Texas) the presumed starter and Bennett Meredith (Arizona State) competing for the No. 2 job with incoming freshman Ryan Browne and West Lafayette graduate Kyle Adams.

Will Walters Be The Next Great Hope For Purdue Football?

At least one high school head coach has major expectations for Ryan Walters and the new Purdue football coaching staff.

As part of The Athletic’s “recruiting confidential” series, high school coaches have been asked about their impressions of staffs from each of the major football conferences. The Big Ten’s number came up earlier this week. In exchange for candid comments, the high

school coaches were granted anonymity.

Not surprisingly, the usual suspects – Michigan, Ohio State, Penn State – popped up most frequently on questions ranging from what schools work your area the hardest to Name Image Likeness (NIL) offers.

Under “Which coach do you hear from the most?” a head coach in Detroit whose school regularly sends players to Big Ten and other Power 5 schools provided this surprising assessment of Walters. “The one that jumps out at me was Purdue’s new coach, Ryan Walters. I really think they’re about to revolutionize the Big Ten in terms of their approach and what they’re looking to do offensively and defensively. You saw a part of that the last couple years at Illinois, running that defense. Just the energy and the way they’ve started to recruit, I think Purdue is about to make some people turn their heads.”

As for the players Walters inherited, a handful were mentioned by Athlon Sports. In comparison, Michigan and Ohio State combined for 37 selections on Athlon’s four preseason All-Big Ten teams.

Running back Devin Mockobee and center Gus Hartwig are second-team selections. Offensive lineman Marcus Mbow and safety Cam Allen were placed on the third team. Sophomore outside linebacker Nic Caraway is on the fourth team.

Mockobee rushed for 968 yards and nine touchdowns as a redshirt freshman behind Hartwig and Mbow. Allen ranked third on the team with 49 tackles and shared the team lead with three interceptions. Caraway had two sacks among his 22 tackles in a reserve role.

Indiana had a first-team selection in kick returner Jaylin Lucas. Linebacker Aaron Casey earned a second-team nod, and wide receiver Cam Camper is on the third team along with defensive lineman Andre Carter and punter James Evans. Offensive lineman Matthew Bedford made the fourth team.

Lucas returned 21 kicks for an average of 28 yards and scored two touchdowns. Casey paced the Hoosiers with 86 tackles a year ago. Camper caught 46 passes for 569 yards and two touchdowns.

Carter is a transfer from Western Michigan, where he earned second-team All-Mid-American Conference honors with 13.5 tackles for loss and seven sacks. Evans averaged 44.3 yards per punt.

On the other hand

ESPN writer Tom Vanhaaren is not as optimistic about Walters’ transition to a first-time head coach.

In a story examining first-year coaches recruiting, VanHaaren notes that Walters’ late hire (Dec. 13) led to a 14-person high school

class that ranked 63rd overall.

“That said, the coaches currently have eight commitments in the 202 class and have been able to start building with more time,” VanHaaren writes.

I’m skeptical, though, about VanHaaren’s claim that Walters has been unable to capitalize on the transfer portal to its fullest because of his late hire. Getting one of the top quarterbacks in the portal, Texas’ Hudson Card, may end up being the difference between a rebuilding season and a winning one.

Card wasn’t even mentioned by VanHaaren, who singled out former Penn State cornerback Marquis Wilson, Auburn defensive lineman Jeffrey M’ba, Florida Atlantic wide receiver Jahmal Edrine and Arkansas safety Anthony Brown.

“Given the timing of the hiring, Walters is going to have to be given some patience to try to build a foundation and mold the roster into what he wants,” VanHaaren writes. “With more time, he’ll be able to add to the 2024 class and potentially add some impact transfers in the winter window come December.”

Long odds

Don’t bet on a winning season for Purdue or Indiana. That’s according to DraftKings Sportsbook and On3.com writer Jesse Simon-ton, who analyzed whether the win projections were too high, too low or just right.

At 5.5 (that half point has won Las Vegas oddsmakers a lot of money over the years), Purdue’s projected win total was deemed too high.

“Hudson Card replaces Aidan O’Connell at quarterback, which was a good portal addition but is still a downgrade. Purdue also added a bunch of other pieces from the portal (lots of OL, DL and CBs), but lost its best receiver Charlie Jones and several notable defensive starters.

“The Boilermakers have a first-year coach who must navigate a schedule that includes non-conference games against Fresno State, Virginia Tech and Syracuse – all winnable but none that are gimmies – plus showdowns with Michigan and Ohio State.”

It’s no compliment to the Hoosiers that their 3.5 win total figures to be “just right.”

“Tom Allen’s team plays a Top 10 schedule, per ESPN, with road games at Michigan, Penn State and Maryland. Indiana opens with Ohio State and also plays a non-conference neutral site game against Louisville in Indianapolis.

“While Akron and Indiana State are auto-wins, outside of a home date with Rutgers, Indiana will be underdogs in every other game in 2023.”

Purdue to honor Keady

A week before Gene Keady is inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, the former Purdue basketball coach will be saluted in Mackey Arena.

The ceremony will take place Aug. 5 when the Purdue men’s basketball team will host an alumni game at 11 a.m., followed by an intrasquad scrimmage in Mackey Arena. Tickets go on sale June 20 and will range from \$5 to \$15.

The scrimmage will be a tuneup for a European trip that launches Aug. 7. Purdue will play four games over 11 days while visiting Germany, Italy, Austria and Slovakia.

Purdue trifecta

This news came as a surprise: For the first time in 40 years, the Purdue men’s basketball program ranked in the top 10 for average attendance according to the NCAA.

Mackey Arena’s listed capacity is 14,222 but the Boilermakers averaged 14,876 fans while selling out all 16 of their home games in 2022-23. The average is a school record and ranks 10th nationally.

During the 1982-83 season, Purdue was 10th in average attendance with 13,472 fans per game.

According to Purdue officials, the Boilermakers posted 100 percent capacities in men’s basketball, football and volleyball this past school year. Purdue is the only school in the United States to accomplish that feat in 2022-23.

Purdue was the only Big Ten school to sell out every game, joining Gonzaga, Houston, Xavier, Kansas, Dayton, Duke and Auburn.

The Boilermakers will carry a 57-game sellout streak into the 2023-24 season, selling out every game since Jan. 15, 2019.

Adding to that streak will be a Gavitt Games contest against Xavier on Nov. 13 on FS1. The Musketeers break a streak of three consecutive Gavitt matchups with Marquette.

Purdue and Xavier meet for the first time since Dec. 1, 2012, a 63-57 victory by Xavier in Mackey Arena.

Indiana was not selected to participate in the annual series between the Big Ten and the Big East conferences. The other matchups are Michigan vs. St. John’s at Madison Square Garden (Nov. 13), Wisconsin at Providence (Nov. 14), Marquette at Illinois (Nov. 14), Iowa at Creighton (Nov. 14), Georgetown at Rutgers (Nov. 15), Maryland at Villanova (Nov. 17) and Butler at Michigan State (Nov. 17).

Kenny Thompson is the former sports editor for the Lafayette Journal & Courier and an award-winning journalist. He has covered Purdue athletics for many years.



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